



Montgomery County Council

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Montgomery Council Receives OLO Report on the Achievement Gap in the County

*Findings State MCPS Has Made Progress in
Narrowing the Gap, But It Remains Wide*

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ROCKVILLE, Md., March 12, 2013—Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) has made progress in narrowing the achievement gap among grade level and at-risk measures of student performance, according to a new report by the Montgomery County Office of Legislative Oversight (OLO) that was presented today to the County Council. However, the gap is wide, and it has grown among above grade level measures that align with MCPS' Seven Keys to College and Career Readiness initiative and the Common Core State Standards.

The report is an update on a study carried out in 2008 that examined the progress MCPS had made in closing the achievement gap by race, ethnicity and service group status such as participation in special education. The report describes the magnitude of the achievement gap in areas where MCPS has since made progress and in areas that need improvement. The report also contains recommendations to assist the Council's review of the school system's efforts to narrow the achievement gap.

The Council's Education Committee is tentatively scheduled to hold a worksession on the report on Monday, March 18.

The "achievement gap" refers to disparities in educational performance among high and low performing student groups; it is a long-standing issue among school districts nationwide. Effectively closing the achievement gap requires accelerating the performance of low performing groups so that they can meet the same standards as their higher performing peers. Research shows that a variety of school, community and economic factors contribute to the achievement gap. Views remain mixed on how best to narrow it.

In compiling its report, OLO focused on 11 measures of student performance that reflect how many students met grade level expectations, were above grade level expectations or were academically at-risk over a three-to-five year period since 2007. There were three key findings regarding the current size of the achievement gap.

OLO found that the achievement gap was narrowest among the four measures of grade level performance reviewed: school readiness, MSA proficiency, graduation rate and the percentage of graduates meeting University System of Maryland or Career and Technology Education program requirements. For example, black students were 66-93 percent as likely as white students to meet grade level benchmarks, and students with disabilities were 56-83 percent as likely as regular education students or all students to meet these benchmarks.

OLO also found that the achievement gap was wider among the four measures of above grade level performance reviewed: advanced MSA scores, Algebra 1 completion by Grade 8, AP/IB Performance and SAT/ACT Performance. For example, Latino students were 25-56 percent as likely as their white peers to meet these benchmarks, and students receiving ESOL services were 9-56 percent as likely as their English-proficient peers or all students to meet these benchmarks.

OLO's report also states that the largest achievement gaps occurred among the three at-risk measures reviewed: out of school suspensions, academic ineligibility and dropout rates. For example, black students were three to six times as likely as their white counterparts to demonstrate at-risk performance, and students receiving free and reduced priced meals (FARMS) were twice as likely as non-FARMS or all students to experience these at-risk outcomes.

In terms of MCPS' progress in narrowing the achievement gap since 2007, the picture is more complex. OLO found that MCPS has made progress in narrowing the achievement gap among five measures of grade level and at-risk performance. MCPS achieved mixed progress on two of the measures reviewed that reflect grade level and on at-risk measures where there was inconsistent progress in narrowing the gap by race, ethnicity and service groups.

OLO also found, however, that the achievement gap widened on the four above grade level measures reviewed: MSA advanced scores, Algebra 1 completion by Grade 8 with a C or higher, AP/IB performance, and SAT/ACT performance. Among these measures that align with MCPS' Seven Keys and the Common Core State Standards, high performing groups made greater gains on these benchmarks than low performing groups.

The report offers the Council three recommended issues for discussion to enhance its review of MCPS budget requests targeted at closing the achievement gap:

- The alignment between MCPS' Fiscal Year 2014 budget request and its efforts to close the gap.
- MCPS' expectations for closing the gap based on current and planned investments.
- MCPS' work with other agencies and organizations to narrow the achievement gap.

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